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Characters, Brick by Brick

A Guide for Dreamers

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Foreword

This book is a guide for dreamers, and, to be honest, I am one of them myself. I would say that every person is, to some extent, a dreamer. And many of our fantasies remain in our heads, never receiving any realization or structure. Just imagine how many worthy, bold, and unusual ideas disappear into oblivion simply because they lack structure… Perhaps some mechanic came up with a film plot that could have won an Oscar. Perhaps some housewife conceived an idea for a book that could sell millions of copies. Or some teenager imagined a cartoon that might have become the symbol of an entire generation. Yet all of those ideas simply faded away under the weight of everyday life, a demanding schedule, and the phrase, “I don’t have time for that!”

I sincerely believe that every person is a separate world capable of creating other worlds. More importantly, those worlds can resonate with other people. That is the main reason I wrote this work. I am the same kind of dreamer. Busy with my own affairs, just like you. I simply wanted to systematize the knowledge I have gained over my rather short life.

So that you have at least some idea whose book you are reading, I will tell you a little about myself. At the time of writing this work, I am eighteen years old. Ever since secondary school, I have known that I want to become a film director. This profession contains everything that appeals to me: creating stories, developing characters, using audio and visual effects to give color to a narrative, and so on. Since deciding to develop in the field of directing, I have managed to write two works of fiction: Operation Metamorphosis — Alen Taukebayev and The Art of Death — Alen Taukebayev (since writing those books, I have changed my pen name). In addition, I have had the opportunity to shoot one short film and one music video, as well as take part in the filming of other projects. Needless to say how many films, series, and anime I have watched, or how many books I have read. In short, as you may have gathered, my world is directly connected with imagination.

I do not want you to treat this book as an instruction manual. I want you to see it as a kind of experiment. An experiment in which I try to systematize what I have spent most of my conscious life doing — namely,

imagining. Fantasies that give rise to new universes in which everyone can find something of their own.

I fully understand that the mechanism of creating stories is a complex system consisting of an enormous number of different aspects. Describing its entire structure would be difficult to fit into a single book. That is why this work is devoted to one of the most important aspects of any story — characters.

After this sort of foreword, we can begin taking the phenomenon of the “character” apart piece by piece.

Why Are Characters So Important to Us?

Characters play an incredibly important role in the life of every one of us. Perhaps you do not yet realize just how deeply they have filled our personalities, our choices, and our preferences in almost everything.

Of course, I could draw the conclusion from this that none of us is truly an individual. But I do not actually think that way. At the same time, I would not say that everyone is absolutely unique. Believe me, if every person were completely individual, you would hardly have any friends or acquaintances. You simply would not be able to find common traits with them.

To make my position on this issue easier to understand, I should give a clear example. Imagine that a person is a blank sheet of paper. Different media products leave their colors and strokes on that sheet. Those colors can be films, television series, cartoons, anime, books, and even advertisements. As this happens, every sheet turns into a picture made up of different strokes and colors. Many people consume similar content. For that reason, some of the strokes on different people’s sheets may resemble one another. And it is precisely through those shared strokes that people find common ground with each other.

Many people tend to identify themselves with these “strokes.” Sometimes it even reaches the point where people begin to behave like their favorite

characters. They adopt their phrases, patterns of behavior, ways of walking, styles of clothing, and so on. Such people see something in these characters that resonates with them. And the more a person recognizes themselves in a particular character, the stronger their identification with that character becomes.

There are characters who combine traits that resonate with millions of people. They are capable of changing not only individuals but culture as a whole. One example of such a character is Tyler Durden from the 1999 feature film Fight Club.

“People see themselves as they would like to be.” — Tyler Durden.

In the film, Tyler is presented as a character who opposes the culture of mass consumption. He raises themes such as self-destruction and masculinity and questions social norms. In the film, he appears as someone everyone wants to emulate. Fight Club created such a strong response among people that in 2009 a teenager named Kyle Shaw, inspired by the film Fight Club, set off an explosion outside a Starbucks on Manhattan’s Upper East Side. This is a clear example of how identifying oneself with a character can go beyond copying certain traits and even reach the point of imitating a terrorist act.

Based on these examples, we can confidently say that characters are not merely participants in films, series, and so on. Characters are a genuine tool capable of affecting and influencing people. This tool can be used for good purposes and for less noble ones. Let us examine this through an example.

On September 11, 2001, a terrorist attack took place in the United States. Two passenger planes crashed into the towers of the World Trade Center in New York, causing their collapse. A third plane struck the Pentagon in Washington, while a fourth, which was probably intended for the White House, crashed in Pennsylvania after passengers resisted the hijackers. That tragic day caused the deaths of nearly 3,000 people and led to global changes in international politics. The event divided the lives of Americans into a before and an after. Following the tragedy, citizens of the United States lost a sense of security and confidence in the future. Certain changes also took place in the film industry. Producers and directors began actively making superhero films. Examples include

Spider-Man (2002), The Dark Knight (2008), Iron Man (2008), and so on. One of the reasons for the growth of the superhero genre was people's fear. They needed hope and a sense of safety. Superhero films were aimed at supporting people during such a stressful period. And judging by the ratings these films have today, one can say that they fulfilled that purpose.

In addition, characters can also provide a strong commercial opportunity. We often pay attention to a character's clothing, accessories, shoes, and other attributes. This happens because all of these details build a coherent image of a particular hero. And if we like a character, we often want to resemble them. This can take different forms. You might like a character's khaki jacket and buy the same one in order to look a little more like them.

A good example of commerce through characters is the Rolex Submariner watch. James Bond wore this watch in films from 1962 to 1969. Today it is one of the most recognizable watch models in the history of cinema, while Rolex itself has become a symbol of high class and professionalism.

Characters can also motivate us to change ourselves. The film industry offers many examples of characters with developed musculature, stylish hairstyles, and generally striking appearances. All of these factors can serve as inspiration for viewers. Many people, inspired by characters played by Schwarzenegger, Brad Pitt, Christian Bale, and other actors, began paying more attention to their physical condition. Many hairdressers also encounter clients who come in for a haircut and show them a photograph of a character from a film. All of this is another form of characters influencing mass culture.

Characters are also a way of conveying the spirit of an era. Today the film industry contains countless historical films depicting different periods of time, from the Stone Age to documentaries about current world events. And every one of these films has its own characters. We empathize with many of them and look up to many of them.

"Hard times create strong people, strong people create good times, and good times create weak people." This quotation describes very well one of the main reasons we like the heroes of historical films. They embody images of real people who displayed their best qualities in pursuit of some

goal. The film industry understands this perfectly well and exploits the images of historical figures in every way it can. Authors show these figures at their best and sometimes embellish certain aspects. Take Achilles from the 2004 film Troy. In the film, he appears not only as an exceptional warrior but also as a man with what could almost be called a bodybuilder's physique. Yet it is not known for certain whether the real Achilles actually possessed such muscular development. The emphasis in the stories about him was always on his combat ability. It is also worth noting Brad Pitt's work in preparing for the role of Achilles. Even before training for the role, Pitt was already in good shape. During preparation, however, he worked with leading Hollywood trainers, followed a high-calorie diet with an emphasis on protein, and actively practiced martial arts. At the time of filming, the actor weighed about 82 kilograms at a height of 1.77 meters and had a fairly low body-fat percentage. So the questions arise: did the real Achilles follow a high-calorie, high-protein diet, given the period in which he lived? Did he have knowledge about increasing muscle mass? Did he look anything like Brad Pitt in the film? Naturally, all of these details were embellished as well. But I cannot say that this is a negative quality. Quite the opposite: viewers generally prefer looking at an attractive, often beautified image. If producers and directors showed everything exactly as it really happened, taking into account every aspect of the period they wanted to portray, viewers would probably find much of it unpleasant or boring. Therefore, when you are inspired by the heroes of historical or documentary films, always keep in mind that what you see is also the contribution of the authors. Sometimes what attracts the viewer is not so much the hero themselves as the authorial vision that made the character what they are. It is pleasant to romanticize history once it is over; it is much harder while it is happening.

From these examples, we can see that characters carry far more within them than it may seem. They can inspire us, convey the spirit of an era, promote different products to the masses, encourage viewers to change their appearance, and sometimes even impose ideas. It is difficult to say whether this is good or bad. Rather, it depends directly on what meanings were built into the characters and how the audience interpreted them.

What Is a “Character” as a Phenomenon?

If we search the Internet for a definition of the term “character,” we will probably see something like this: a character is a participant in a work of fiction. And yes, of course, that is true. But I suggest that we dig a little deeper into the nature of the “character.” To make the information easier to understand, let us imagine a character as a tower that is gradually being built upward toward the sky. For greater clarity, we will compare different objects with different aspects of character construction.

Thus, the sky toward which the tower rises is the character’s goal. The tower is the character themselves, moving toward that goal. If you analyze almost any work, you can see that a character usually has some large or small goal they are pursuing. Naruto’s goal in the anime of the same name was to become Hokage (Hokage is the title of the strongest ninja in the village). The Jedi in Star Wars sought to preserve balance in the Force across the galaxy, and many more examples could be given. But it is also important to remember that there are exceptions in which a character’s goal is extremely vague. There are plenty of works like this as well. Simba in the 1994 film The Lion King, for example, had to understand who he was and what his purpose was. Moana, in the animated film of the same name, sets out on a dangerous voyage in order to understand who she is and what she wants. So the fact that a purpose is not obvious does not necessarily mean that it is absent. Sometimes authors build in the idea that the hero’s goal is to find their goal. There are also characters who have no goal as such. Shrek, for example, simply wanted to live in his swamp and had no desire for heroic adventures until circumstances forced him to go on a journey. Forrest Gump, from the film of the same name, had no grand goal either: he simply lived, loved, ran, and life itself led him to important things. From all of these examples we can conclude that the “sky” above a character is not always clear, and sometimes there is no visible sky at all. But the absence of a visible “sky”

does not mean the absence of space, which means the tower still has room to rise. We have dealt with the sky — the goal — so let us move on. What is a tower made of? Bricks and cement, of course. But let us work out what these bricks and cement represent. Imagine that the bricks are the character's actions and the cement is their thoughts. In this way, the character grows through the bricks, while those actions in turn arise from thoughts — the cement. The point is that bricks alone will not take you very far. If a character is built without cement, meaning without thoughts, they are doomed to feel dry and uninteresting to the audience. They risk becoming a simple figure who performs an incomprehensible, illogical sequence of actions. We will not be able to empathize with such a character. But if we do the opposite, the character — the tower — will not move anywhere. They will simply sit and think, which is not engaging at all. One might just as well write a continuous monologue. The interplay between a character's actions and thoughts is especially clear in stories where a person has to pretend to be someone they are not. In such moments, the character's nonverbal behavior speaks for them: their gaze, facial expression, way of walking, and so on. Consider the 2009 film Inglourious Basterds, specifically the bar scene. Nazis are drinking and enjoying themselves in a bar, but undercover agents are there as well, drinking and talking with them. At one point, undercover agent Lieutenant Archie Hicox asks the bartender for three glasses of alcohol and shows the number three with his fingers. There is only one problem: Hicox does not know that when Germans indicate numbers on their fingers, they begin with the thumb. Hicox instead raises his index, middle, and ring fingers. This tiny gesture exposes him as an agent, and Nazi Major Hellstrom notices it. At first, Hellstrom gives no outward sign that anything is wrong. But his eyes say a great deal. It is through the major's gaze that the audience realizes the agents have been exposed. His gaze reflects the character's thoughts and gives the viewer room to feel the full tension of the situation. If Hellstrom had simply shot the agents immediately after the gesture, the scene would not have been nearly as captivating. It is precisely the expression of a character's thoughts that allows us to feel them more deeply and empathize with them. I would also like to mention a work in which a character's thoughts

and actions are in almost perfect balance: the series Dexter (2006). Its main character is a forensic specialist who kills “bad” people because he has a psychological compulsion — a desire to kill. The creators came up with a direct but interesting way of conveying his thoughts. Throughout the series, Dexter conducts an internal dialogue with himself, allowing the viewer to understand his nature more deeply. This internal monologue is exactly what turns Dexter from a simple psychopathic killer into a layered and interesting personality whom viewers can follow with interest for eight seasons. His thoughts are literally spoken directly to the audience, yet even in this form they hold our attention.

When describing this tower, we can also say a great deal about its height. In this case, the height of the tower is the character’s life journey. Some characters have very tall towers; others have much shorter ones. Take the 1997 film Titanic. It has two main characters, Rose DeWitt Bukater and Jack Dawson. At the time they meet aboard the Titanic, Rose is seventeen and Jack is twenty. Yet their destinies turn out very differently. Jack dies in the shipwreck at the same age at which we meet him, while Rose lives to the age of 101. Moreover, the entire film is framed through her memories of what happened. In this case, Rose’s tower is many times taller than Jack’s. That is what I mean by a character’s life journey. A similar example can be found in the 1999 film The Green Mile. The protagonist is prison guard Paul Edgecomb. One day an enormous prisoner named John Coffey arrives at the prison, accused of murdering two little girls. He is sentenced to death in the electric chair. As Paul gets to know John, however, he realizes that Coffey is innocent of the murders. He learns this through John’s mystical gift. Through that gift, Paul seems to witness what really happened with his own eyes. Coffey also heals Paul of a bladder illness, almost as if he has shared part of his own power with him. After receiving this mystical energy from the innocent prisoner, Paul gains an unnaturally long life. He sees the gift as both “a blessing and a curse.” By the end of the film, Paul Edgecomb is over one hundred years old, and the story is once again told from his point of view. His tower is not only far taller than those of the others; it is still being built. These examples also suggest that characters with very long life journeys often

become the narrators of their stories. This is not a mandatory rule of storytelling. It is more of a cliché or genre convention.

Now we come to the final aspect of any character's tower. It may be last on the list, but certainly not in importance. Imagine that our tower has not only four walls, but layers as well: behind one wall is another, then a third, and so on. All of these layers of the tower are layers of the character we are examining. In my view, it is precisely this layered nature that makes a character as interesting as possible. As always, let us examine the idea through an example. Who is Batman in The Dark Knight trilogy (2005–2012)? First layer: Batman is a hero who protects Gotham and fights crime. Second layer: Batman is a man who takes justice into his own hands and punishes criminals, creating a problem for Gotham's authorities. Third layer: Batman is Bruce Wayne, a man who inherited an enormous fortune and a highly profitable company from his father. Fourth layer: Bruce Wayne is a spoiled man who spends his billions freely. Fifth layer: Bruce Wayne is a former member of the League of Shadows who betrayed it. Sixth layer: Bruce Wayne is a boy whose parents were murdered before his eyes, a boy who blames himself for their deaths. So, by examining only one character, we have already found six layers. Admit it: no one would be interested in watching a Batman who did nothing but put on a costume and fight criminals. We are captivated not only by his image as a vigilante but also by the inner side of Bruce Wayne. This is one of the main reasons the character of Batman has existed for so long and films about him continue to be made.

So what do we have at the end of this chapter? A character is a tower that is being built, or has already been completed if the character's life journey has ended. This tower rises toward the sky — the character's goal. Yet the sky above a character is not always clear, and sometimes it is not visible at all. The tower itself is built from bricks and cement: the bricks are the character's actions, while the cement is their thoughts and feelings. The height of the tower is directly proportional to the character's life journey, and inside it are additional layers — other sides of that same character. This is the foundation on which the motivation of any character is built.

Building on this tower metaphor, I believe that every person's task is to become an interesting character — someone about whom it would be interesting to watch a film or series, or read a book. Someone may say that each of us is already a character in our own right. Certainly, but the question is: are you an interesting character or a boring one? Can people empathize with you? You can assess this only by analyzing your own tower. One person's tower may contain too much cement and too few bricks: they think a great deal but take no action. Another person's tower may contain only one layer. Such personalities are, by definition, less interesting to others. Above someone else's tower, the sky may never seem to form at all — in other words, some people see no goal in their lives. Some of them might object that I mentioned characters who also lacked a global goal: Shrek, Moana, and Simba. Yes, but two factors matter. First, Moana and Simba were searching for that goal and for their purpose. Second, remember that you are not characters in a film. In films, cartoons, and television series, almost anything can happen. The adventures of fictional heroes are largely created for them by screenwriters and directors. The main director of your own life, however, is you. That means building your "tower" and finding your "sky" are your own responsibility.

The main difference between us and characters on a screen is that the heroes of films, series, cartoons, and so on always have a large group of people working on them. We, meanwhile, are often forced to manage on our own. Since we have touched on the subject of authors, I would like to devote the next chapter to them.

The Author's Role in Building a Character

I would like to begin this chapter with the fact that a character can be incredibly interesting, layered, and easy to empathize with in concept. But what use is that if the author cannot present them properly to the audience? The responsibility for how a character is perceived therefore lies with the author. The film industry contains examples of characters

who were compelling in themselves but were not fully conveyed by the creators. One such example is the 2016 film Suicide Squad. It features a remarkable pair of characters: Harley Quinn and the Joker. In the comics, Harley Quinn is charismatic and intelligent, yet tragically dependent on the Joker; she was previously his psychiatrist. In the film, however, she is portrayed as overly comic, given too little personal drama, and turned into an object of sexualization. The Joker is one of the greatest villains in comic-book history, yet in the film he plays almost no meaningful role. His storyline is cut down to an absurd degree and his motivations are unclear. He looks more like a parody of himself. Now consider this: would a viewer familiar with the comics call Harley Quinn and the Joker boring characters? Of course not. From this example we can draw the following conclusion: the characters themselves are genuinely compelling, but the creators failed to convey them fully to the audience. This introduction already gives us a better understanding of the author's role in building a character.

In the previous chapter, we imagined a character as a tower that continues to be built. In this chapter, I want you to imagine the author as a sniper — a sniper who aims at that tower and can fire at it. Imagine also that the bullets can destroy a single brick, an entire level, or sometimes the whole tower. This depends on the author's personal goals. Through the scope of the sniper rifle, the author can examine different parts of the tower.

The author can bring either a small section of the tower or the entire structure into view. This means that a story can cover a brief period of a character's life or their whole life from beginning to end. As always, let us look at examples. In the 2008 film The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, the main character, Benjamin Button, ages in reverse — he moves from the condition of an old man toward that of an infant. A plot like this naturally requires the author to consider Benjamin's entire life, seeing his tower from its foundation to its highest point. A different example is the 1957 film 12 Angry Men. There, the author considers the characters' lives only within the limits of a jury deliberation. We are not introduced to the jurors' pasts or told what becomes of them later. In other words, through the scope the author sees only a small section of each of those towers.

Now let us talk about the bullets fired from this sniper rifle. Think of the bullets as obstacles on a character's path. In a sense, the author is always the villain of every character, because it is the creator of the story who places difficulties in that character's way. As I mentioned earlier, these bullets can vary greatly. Some may knock out a single brick, some an entire floor, and some the whole tower. Consider the 2014 film John Wick. Its story revolves around a professional hitman who has retired in order to devote himself to his wife. After some time, his wife dies from illness, leaving him a dog so that he will have something to help him cope with the loss. Soon after her death, criminals break into John's home. They kill his dog, beat him, and steal his car. One of the attackers turns out to be the son of a powerful crime boss who knows Wick personally. After these events, John decides to return to his former role as a killer and begins hunting the man responsible. In this story, the death of his wife, the killing of his dog, and the theft of his car are the principal bullets that tear away a substantial level of John Wick's tower. This brings us to the most interesting aspect of the bullets: every tower reacts differently when it is hit. John's tower, for example, only becomes stronger after these shots. He begins eliminating his enemies one by one, sharpens his combat skills, and, one could say, challenges the entire world. The next example is Mad Max: Fury Road (2015). The film takes place in a post-apocalyptic world. Max Rockatansky begins his journey as a loner who has lost everything he once had. By the end, however, he appears before the audience as a true legend capable of sacrificing himself for others. His character tower also becomes stronger after being struck by the bullets of the apocalypse and the loss of everything he cared about. We can also mention Rocky (1976). Rocky Balboa begins his journey as an unknown fighter. Throughout the story, the author keeps firing bullets into Balboa's tower, but instead of stopping him, they strengthen him. In the end, Rocky earns the title of champion and proves that he achieved what he had always wanted. There are countless examples of this kind.
But a tower can respond to shots in a completely different way. Sometimes, after the author's bullets strike it, the character's tower begins to collapse instead. Such stories are no less interesting to watch because they show us a less pleasant side of life. Our lives do not consist

only of victories and constant “upward movement.” Sometimes the tower falls. In cinema, a clear example is The Shining (1980). Jack Torrance is a writer trying to deal with alcohol addiction and problems within his family. Over the course of the film, Jack gradually loses his mind and becomes an obsessed killer. The 1983 film Scarface offers another example. Its protagonist, Tony Montana, is an immigrant who desperately wants to succeed. He does achieve success at one stage of his life, but over time becomes increasingly paranoid and brutal. In the end, Tony dies alone. I would also like to mention one installment of the Star Wars franchise, Star Wars: Episode III — Revenge of the Sith (2005). Its central character is Anakin Skywalker. At first, he appears as a good Jedi Knight, a hero of the Clone Wars, a conscientious man, and, most importantly, the great hope of the Jedi. But in the third film, Anakin loses himself under the influence of his fear of losing the woman he loves. Palpatine, a Sith Lord, manipulates that fear. As the film progresses, Anakin falls to the dark side, attacks his beloved Padmé with his own hands, and loses a duel to Obi-Wan. He suffers injuries that are almost incompatible with life, but Palpatine manages to save him and creates a special suit that keeps him alive. After all of this, Anakin is no longer the person he once was. From that point forward, his identity becomes Darth Vader. This example of a character’s degradation is especially important because, after Anakin’s “tower” was destroyed, Darth Vader’s “tower” began to be built. Through the hero’s degradation, a new personality emerges. That is precisely why this part of the franchise evokes such strong emotion.

With the last example, I wanted to convey the idea that what seems to be a single character may actually have far more than one tower. But it is important to distinguish between layers and separate towers. A character’s other towers are their other personalities, while the layers of one tower are the layers of one personality. This distinction matters. If we talk about characters with many towers, the first example that comes to mind is Fight Club (1999), which I mentioned earlier. The protagonist, who has no definite name, is an office worker suffering from insomnia and obsessed with consumer culture. At a certain point in his life he meets Tyler Durden, with whom he soon opens an underground fight club. Tyler Durden is the living embodiment of all the protagonist’s hidden desires.

Meanwhile, the idea of the fight club gradually turns into a terrorist organization. Near the end of the film, the protagonist realizes that Tyler does not exist because Tyler is his second personality. It turns out that he carried out all the events of the film alone. After this shocking realization, a chain of terrible events follows, and the protagonist kills his second personality, Tyler Durden. The tower structure of this film is extremely interesting. At first the protagonist's tower develops, and then Tyler's tower appears. For a time the two towers grow in unison, but gradually Tyler begins to take over: his tower becomes stronger while the protagonist's grows weaker. It is also worth mentioning an interesting production detail. During filming, Brad Pitt, who played Tyler, gained muscle mass as the shoot progressed, while Edward Norton, who played the protagonist, lost weight. This detail reinforces the idea of two different towers belonging, at first glance, to one character.

Another example is the 2016 film Split. Its main character, Kevin, is a man with dissociative identity disorder. Twenty-three different personalities live within him, each with its own character, habits, and even physical traits. They differ in age and even in gender, from the child Hedwig to the strict Patricia and the dangerous Dennis. As the film develops, another personality appears inside Kevin — the Beast — possessing superhuman strength. Kevin would clearly hold the record for the greatest number of towers among the characters we know. Taking all of this into account, we can say that twenty-four towers are being built simultaneously in the film. Again, these are not layers of one character but separate, fully formed personalities.

To sum up this chapter, the author fires at a character's tower not only in order to destroy it, but sometimes in order to build a new tower. The author can also fire shots that strengthen the character and make them stronger. In other cases, the author deliberately destroys a character in order to show their decline, which can be just as interesting to watch. It matters less whether a character develops or deteriorates. What matters more is the dynamism of their movement.

Tools for Presenting a Character’s Image

Besides the character themselves, there are also tools through which the author presents them. It is important to understand that the presentation of a hero is not the hero’s tower. It is rather what surrounds the character, not what exists inside them. Such tools can include a character’s attributes, style, body language, phrases, and so on. You probably remember that earlier in the book we mentioned how brands can influence and complement a character’s image, as in the example of Rolex watches and James Bond. Companies that try to sell their products through characters in films, series, and other media can be viewed as a form of advertising, much like advertisements we see on city buildings, posts, walls, and elsewhere. Such advertising can be obvious or subtle. This phenomenon is commonly known as product placement.

Product placement is the phenomenon in which a real product or brand appears in a film, series, music video, or game not as an explicit advertisement but as a natural part of the story. For example, a character drinks Coca-Cola, uses an iPhone, drives a BMW, or walks into Starbucks. Nobody says, “This is the best drink, phone, car, or coffee shop!” The brand simply appears naturally in the frame. But the company has paid for its product to be shown.

There is also a phenomenon known as product replacement. Product replacement is the opposite situation: a real brand is replaced with a fictional one in order to avoid advertising it or to avoid legal problems. For example, a film may show a can labeled Cola instead of Coca-Cola, or replace Apple’s logo with a bitten pear. Or the creators may invent an entirely fictional brand, like Los Pollos Hermanos in Breaking Bad (2008–2013).

A character’s attributes do not have to take the form of advertising. They can also be individual objects directly associated with the hero and deliberately written into the film, series, or other work by its creators. Such attributes act as strong signals that allow us to recognize a character among thousands. One example is Captain Jack Sparrow’s compass in Pirates of the Caribbean (2003–2017). The compass is an important idea within the franchise. It does not point north; instead, it

points toward what its holder desires most. In a sense, the compass reflects Jack's own nature. He himself does not fully know what he wants, yet some magical force continually leads him toward what he desires. In the first film, Jack is searching for his ship, the Black Pearl; in the second, for Davy Jones's heart; in the third, for the right choice; and in the fourth, for the Fountain of Youth. When we see this compass on screen, we immediately think of Jack even if he is not present in the scene. Weapons can function as similar external attributes. If I ask you which hero used a hammer, you will probably answer Thor. Or, at the very least, you might remember the Driver from Drive (2011), whose hammer carried a sense of justice. Since we have touched on character weapons, I cannot avoid mentioning Anton Chigurh's main weapon in No Country for Old Men (2007): a captive-bolt pistol used for slaughtering livestock. An unusual choice, is it not? Certainly, but also an extremely symbolic one. It emphasizes Chigurh's cold and inhuman nature. A tool intended for killing animals is used by him against people, making him an especially terrifying and emotionless killer who acts as quietly and efficiently as the weapon itself. If, for instance, Patrick Bateman from American Psycho (2000) used such a device, it would look absurd. The weapon would not fit his type. Anton Chigurh is an emotionless killer; Patrick Bateman is an impulsive psychopath, and the chainsaw we see him use in the film suits him far better.

A character's external attributes are not limited to tools and weapons. Food and drinks associated with particular heroes can play the same role. Many well-known characters have their own food preferences. This is a small detail, but it still contributes to building the character. Food is an inseparable part of any person's way of life, and characters in films, series, and other works are no exception. There is a reason for the saying, "You are what you eat." Tony Stark from the Iron Man films (2008–2013), for example, is a genius, billionaire, playboy, and philanthropist, as he likes to describe himself. He is constantly busy building high-tech devices, suits, and weapons. With a schedule like his, he is practically forced to eat quickly. And what can fill you up while also being quick to eat better than a burger? That is why we repeatedly see him eating burgers in the films. The food fits him as a character and has become

strongly associated with him. James Bond also cannot be ignored, because he has his own favorite drink: a martini, “shaken, not stirred.” Like his watch, the drink has become one of cinema’s signature beverages. And when speaking about alcohol in cinema, it is impossible to imagine Captain Jack Sparrow without his beloved bottle of rum. Jack is a pirate, and there is a widespread stereotype that pirates often carried rum aboard their ships. In addition, Jack’s mood is usually remarkably upbeat even in stressful and unpleasant situations. One might be tempted to connect his distinctive walk with alcohol as well, but drunkenness is not the reason for it. Jack has spent most of his life at sea, and even on land he behaves as though he is constantly trying to find his balance on a moving surface. Sometimes creators invent signature foods for an entire universe, as in the Harry Potter films, where butterbeer and chocolate frogs exist. These treats became external markers not only of individual characters but of the whole fictional world. That is why theme parks also sell them. Another example of a cinematic universe’s distinctive food is the blue milk associated with Star Wars: Episode IV — A New Hope (1977). This brings to mind another favorite technique used by directors: villains drinking milk. Anton Chigurh in No Country for Old Men (2007), Hans Landa in Inglourious Basterds (2009), Alex DeLarge in A Clockwork Orange (1971), Arthur Fleck in Joker (2019), and Homelander in The Boys (2019) all drink milk in different scenes. But have you ever wondered why? Directors often use milk as a symbol of ironic purity that contrasts with a character’s cruelty or madness. Why milk rather than juice or some other drink? For many people, milk is connected with childhood, safety, and motherhood. Its white color symbolizes purity and innocence, but in the hands of a villain it becomes a disturbing parody of purity and innocence. When an antagonist drinks milk, the image suggests a moral innocence turned upside down. However, learning about this technique does not mean that every food item in a film must carry a narrative or dramatic meaning. Sometimes the reason is simpler. Brad Pitt, for example, is constantly chewing something on screen in a large portion of his films. Sometimes this has meaning, but often the filmmakers simply like how naturally and appetizingly Pitt eats on camera. Fans even joke, “If someone is eating in a scene, it is probably

Brad Pitt.” Another example is actor Sung Kang, known to many viewers as Han Lue in The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift (2006). If you remember, Han also constantly snacks on nuts and other small foods. There is a reason for this as well. Han first appeared in Justin Lin’s Better Luck Tomorrow (2002), before Lin directed Tokyo Drift. Han was constantly eating in that film too. Lin and Sung Kang decided to preserve the gesture as part of the character’s personality. Kang has explained in interviews that Han used to smoke but quit, and now chews in order to keep his hands and mouth occupied as a way of dealing with stress. Thus nuts, chips, and dried fruit function as a replacement for cigarettes. Besides objects, weapons, food, and drinks, cinema also provides examples of a character’s external image being expressed through symbols. Batman is an obvious example, regardless of whether we are speaking about films, series, comics, or animation. Show the famous bat symbol to almost any passerby and ask whether they recognize it; the answer will very likely be yes. The same can be said about the symbols of Superman, Spider-Man, Captain America, and others. Such symbols are exactly what make these heroes immediately recognizable. If those symbols did not exist, that would not mean the films themselves would have failed. Of course not. But the heroes’ external images would blend more easily with other superheroes whose symbols are less widespread or absent altogether. They would not stand out as strongly as they do now. We might simply see them as a group of people in tight-fitting costumes. When creating a symbol, however, it is important to take into account the meaning built into the character. The viewer should be able to associate the symbol with the character as naturally as possible. In the examples above, bats were Bruce Wayne’s greatest fear, while Peter Parker — the young man behind the Spider-Man mask — received his powers after being bitten by a radioactive spider. These are examples of strong links between symbol and character. Superheroes are not the only ones with effective symbols; supervillains have them too. Perhaps the clearest example is the Joker card found in a standard deck of playing cards. Even people who do not play card games recognize it, and the character has become closely associated with the image. The Joker uses the Joker card because it represents chaos, unpredictability, and stepping

outside the rules — everything he himself represents in comics and film. With that in mind, it is hardly surprising that the card has become so closely connected with the villain.

When discussing a character's external presentation, it is impossible not to mention appearance, which plays an extremely important role in the overall image. A character's appearance is the first thing the viewer notices and the basis on which initial conclusions are made. You have probably had moments when, while talking with a friend about a film, you forgot a character's name and described them as "the muscular guy in the mask" or "that long-haired brunette." This suggests that first impressions really are based on appearance, and appearance is often what we remember as well. Some characters have such distinctive looks that seeing a man in a black leather coat can make us think, "Is that Neo from The Matrix?" Or a man walking past in a sand-colored hat can immediately resemble Indiana Jones. We can only admire costume designers who create images recognizable among thousands. Ideally, those images should also echo the character's nature and carry a story of their own. Clothing can reflect a character's development, as in Joker (2019). At the beginning, Arthur Fleck wears faded clothes in dirty, muted tones that visualize deep depression and hopelessness. When he becomes the Joker, however, the costume turns bright, eccentric, and confident, reflecting an inner liberation. A similar evolution in clothing appears in Breaking Bad. Walter White initially wears beige and green garments as an inconspicuous schoolteacher. As the story progresses, his clothes become darker and darker, symbolizing his transformation into Heisenberg. His famous black hat becomes a visual sign of the transition into another identity. Another film in which color and clothing play a major role is La La Land (2016). The colors of Emma Stone's costumes reflect her emotional condition and development: early in the film, bright yellows and greens symbolize dreams and energy; by the finale, pastel and muted shades suggest acceptance of reality and maturity. I would like to finish these examples with a character we have already discussed: Tony Stark from the Iron Man films (2008–2013). His image is distinctive not only because it is striking and recognizable. Tony literally builds it himself, learning from every mistake. It begins when Stark is taken

prisoner in Afghanistan and constructs his first suit of armor in a cave in order to escape. The armor is too heavy and awkward. His next suit is lighter and includes a flight system, but on its first flight it ices over and fails. A later prototype receives gold-titanium plating and improved engines, yet is still difficult to put on. The following version improves assembly and mobility. By learning from each failure, Tony Stark improves every new version of his suit. “If I was vulnerable once, I’ll make sure it never happens again.” — Tony Stark. These examples show that a hero’s clothing can play a much more important role than simply helping the character stand out. At the same time, not every costume contains deliberate authorial symbolism. The film industry knows many cases in which actors themselves changed a character’s appearance. One of the most famous is Captain Jack Sparrow, whom I have mentioned repeatedly in this book. Did you know that Jack was not originally conceived with such a distinctive costume, mannerisms, or way of walking? At first, the Captain was intended to look like an ordinary pirate. When Johnny Depp took on the role, however, he argued that pirates could be compared with the rock stars of the past because they shared similar values, ideals, and ways of life. That is why the Jack we know and love has so many accessories, darkened eyes, and layers of clothing. In fact, when Depp first appeared on set in this form, producers thought he was mocking the project and nearly removed him. Once he convinced them of his vision for Jack, filming was completed and sequels followed. In the end, nobody regretted Depp’s bold idea for Captain Jack Sparrow. A similar example is the legendary Joker played by Heath Ledger in The Dark Knight (2008). Earlier versions of the Joker often used carefully designed theatrical makeup. Ledger proposed applying the makeup himself so that it would look uneven and homemade. The result reflected the character’s psychological state and differed from classic comic-book versions. Another good example is Travis Bickle in Taxi Driver (1976). Robert De Niro, who played Travis, came up with the famous mohawk hairstyle for the point at which the character finally loses control. He also insisted that the costume be as simple and street-level as possible. The filmmakers liked the idea, and the hairstyle became a visual symbol of the character’s inner explosion. I would like to conclude with a character

from the Russian film Brother (1997). Actor Sergei Bodrov, who played Danila Bagrov, suggested dressing the protagonist in ordinary, worn street clothes and removing the glamorous cinematic polish. Bodrov had himself lived through the crisis of the 1990s that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union across the CIS, so he had a sense of how the protagonist of a film about a Russian gangster in the 1990s should look.

From the examples above, we can conclude that a character's tower is generally built by the creators of a work — directors, writers, screenwriters, producers, and so on — while the character's external image can also be shaped by actors. Actors are the people through whom characters are presented to the audience, and they often understand their characters extremely well. Moreover, they usually work side by side with the creators who built the "tower" and who can guide them in the right direction or, on the contrary, give them creative freedom in revealing the character.

Music connected directly with a particular character can also be counted among the tools used to present that character's image. It is no secret that large projects — films, series, and animation — are created by enormous teams that include far more than directors, producers, screenwriters, actors, costume designers, and editors. Composers also make an important contribution by creating musical scores. You have probably noticed that when we remember certain characters, we can also associate them with a musical theme from the film or series. In the overwhelming majority of films and series, the main character has a principal musical theme. In a soundtrack playlist it is often labeled something like "Character's Theme." If no such track exists, the work's main theme may itself function as the character's associative theme. Filmmakers use these themes repeatedly, usually when the central character appears in a scene. The arrangement can change, but the underlying motif remains the same. This expands the character's auditory image, builds association, and helps convey the mood of a scene. As I mentioned, the motif remains constant while the type of performance changes. In this way, creators can evoke joy, sadness, shock, and other emotions. Sometimes a soundtrack can even transport us to another country, as happens in the John Wick films (2014–2023). John Wick's main

musical theme is “Chop Shop” by Tyler Bates and Joel J. Richard, first heard in the first film. The same motif then returns in other tracks with different moods. The second film takes place partly in Rome, for example, where we hear “Wick in Rome” by Bates and Richard — the same motif, but with Italian elements. In the fourth film, Wick arrives in Japan, and we hear “Wick in Osaka,” again the same motif, now with Japanese coloring. This is an example of cultural and geographical musical characterization. There is also an emotional dimension. In The Batman (2022), the soundtrack includes the hero’s principal theme, “The Batman” by Michael Giacchino, which has a heroic and triumphant character. But the soundtrack also includes “Sonata in Darkness.” We recognize the same motif, yet it is performed with a distinctive piano sound and a sad atmosphere. Consider another track from the same score, “The Bat’s True Calling”: the motif appears again, this time with a stronger emphasis on lyricism and epic scale. I deliberately chose simple examples in which even the track titles make the intended effect clear. In fact, you can perform the same exercise with many films and notice a recurring pattern. The point of this section was simply to demonstrate how composers can complement a character’s image through music and, through that, influence the audience.

To conclude this chapter, I wanted to show through clear examples that besides the “character tower,” there is also what we might call the “character fence.” The “character fence” consists of the tools through which the hero is presented to the audience. This fence can have many components: objects, attributes, weapons, food, drinks, brands, clothing, appearance, mannerisms, nonverbal behavior, and even music. It is important to note, however, that while the “tower” can be influenced only by the authors — directors, producers, screenwriters, and so on — the “fence” can also be influenced by the actors themselves. Actors may introduce their own changes because they spend a long time inhabiting a character and often come to understand that character’s nature very well. Such initiatives can be highly successful and may ultimately be received very positively by viewers. For that reason, authors should sometimes give actors a little more creative freedom in order to create a more living character.

Groups of Towers

In the previous chapters, we looked at individual towers from different angles. That means it is time to move on to groups of towers. If we can visualize characters from different works as complete “towers” and clearly examine what they consist of, then a group of towers is something rather different.

I did, of course, try to come up with an analogy for defining a “group of towers,” but it is not so simple. I could say that a group of towers is a certain number of towers standing in one row or in the same area. Or I could say that a group of towers consists of towers whose bricks are all the same color. Personally, I do not like such strange definitions. So I would like you to think of groups of towers as a shared idea connecting a certain number of towers — that is, characters. Forgive me for not providing a more precise analogy. By this shared idea I mean common values, goals, plans, and worldviews among different characters.

It is important to note that groups of characters can be observed not only within one particular work, but also across entirely different works. What I mean is that, while watching seemingly different films or series, we often encounter essentially the same kinds of characters, only in different forms and circumstances.

Perhaps the clearest example of such groups of towers is the Marvel Cinematic Universe, especially the Avengers films, which began in 2012 and continue to be produced at the time of writing. The Avengers group includes characters such as Tony Stark (Iron Man), Steve Rogers (Captain America), Thor, Bruce Banner (the Hulk), Natasha Romanoff (Black Widow), Clint Barton (Hawkeye), and others. A defining feature of this group is that each of them possesses greater capabilities than ordinary people. Most have superpowers, while Tony Stark is a genius who controls a super-suit — an example we have already examined above. Having such abilities, they want to use them to preserve peace. Each hero has a personal story that led them to become part of this group. It is

important to note that they are not all the same character type, but they do belong to one group. In opposition to them, the authors created another group: antagonists who stand in the Avengers' way. These include Loki, Ultron, Thanos, Ebony Maw and the Black Order, Aldrich Killian, Baron Zemo, Kang the Conqueror, and others. As you may already understand, their ideas and worldview differ radically from those of the Avengers. The antagonists listed above seek control and order, but they pursue them through destruction and subjugation. Again, they are not one single character type. Each Marvel antagonist has a personal tragedy that led them toward these ideas. To sum up this example, the Avengers films present a confrontation between two groups of characters — heroes and antagonists. This simple structure is as old as storytelling itself, but it will probably always remain relevant. One reason is that people naturally divide things into good and bad, and stories like these satisfy our need for a clear dualism. That is one reason for the popularity of Marvel films and many similar stories.

Another example that supports this idea of character groups is the previously mentioned 1999 film The Matrix. Its characters can also be divided into groups. The central group consists of the protagonists who fight for freedom and truth: Morpheus, Neo, Trinity, Dozer, Switch, Apoc, Mouse, Tank, and Niobe. Viewers primarily empathize with these characters because they fight for the benefit of others, and the story reveals their lives much more fully than those of the other groups. Another group consists of the Agents of the Matrix, created to control and suppress people. These include Agent Smith, Agent Brown, and Agent Jones. They are the main antagonists around whom much of the conflict develops. A third group consists of programs and entities inside the Matrix that are not Agents. These are conscious programs with wills of their own. They include the Oracle, a program that predicts the future; the Architect, creator of the Matrix; and independent programs such as the Merovingian and Persephone. The final group consists of ordinary people connected to the Matrix, who receive the least development in the film. The Matrix demonstrates a more complex structure of character grouping. With this example I wanted to show that grouping characters can be more complicated than simply protagonist versus antagonist.

Now we can smoothly move on to grouping characters from entirely separate films and series. You have probably noticed that in different works you often like characters with similar or even identical types.
One such type is the broken genius — someone cursed by their own intelligence. Examples include Sherlock Holmes from the 2010 television series, Walter White from Breaking Bad (2008–2013), and Light Yagami from the 2006 anime Death Note. Their intelligence is both a gift and a curse. They see more than they should, and that same ability ultimately breaks them.
Another type consists of characters who move along a path of self-destruction. Examples include Travis Bickle from Taxi Driver (1976), Nina Sayers from Black Swan (2010), and Arthur Fleck from Joker (2019). For them, life revolves around suffering or redemption. They seek pain because it is through pain that they feel alive.
Next are characters who are walking embodiments of chaos. Examples include the Joker from The Dark Knight, Trevor Philips from the video game Grand Theft Auto V (2013), and Billy Butcher from The Boys (2019). They do not need meaning as much as they need energy: they destroy in order to feel alive.
Another character type is what we might call the idealistic savior. Superman in his many adaptations, Captain America in Marvel films, and Oppenheimer in the 2023 film adaptation can be placed in this category. They firmly believe they can change the world even when the world itself is breaking them. They act from sincere motives but pay a personal price.
I would also like to note a type that might be called awakened philosophers or seekers of meaning. Examples include Truman from The Truman Show (1998), the repeatedly mentioned Neo from The Matrix (1999), and Rick Deckard from Blade Runner 2049 (2017). These characters become aware of the illusion surrounding them and begin searching for the truth. Their freedom begins with recognizing the lie.
We should also mention the wandering antihero with a personal code of honor, a type loved by many viewers. Examples include Geralt of Rivia from The Witcher (2019), the Mandalorian from the 2019 series of the same name, and Clint Eastwood’s characters in various westerns. They

are neither conventional heroes nor villains. They live according to their own code and do not depend on society’s approval.

Another type is the chaotic adventurer: Han Solo from the Star Wars universe, Captain Jack Sparrow from Pirates of the Caribbean, or Deadpool from the 2016 film of the same name. They live for adventure, freedom, and personal gain. Their morality is flexible, but their charisma is enormous. They are cynics with good hearts, acting on impulse and often saving the world almost by accident.

I would also like to mention solitary avengers who live for revenge. These include John Wick from the film series of the same name, Batman in his many adaptations, and Oh Dae-su from Oldboy. They live for retribution, do not know how to forgive, and are loners by conviction. Their goal is to restore justice even at the cost of their own lives. They believe the world is rotten and that justice can be achieved only with their own hands.

Naturally, these are far from all the character types we can encounter in different works. In reality there are many more. I have shown you only a portion so that you can gain some understanding of how characters may be grouped. These examples simply demonstrate why we are attracted to certain types of characters across different films and what distinguishes each type.

At the same time, we should not overlook the fact that a character is a very flexible entity and can change groups. Many works demonstrate this clearly.

Let us return to an example I mentioned earlier in the book: Anakin Skywalker from the Star Wars films. At first, Anakin belonged to the Jedi group of towers. He was the Chosen One who was supposed to restore balance to the Force and was one of the most powerful Jedi in the galaxy. Unfortunately, Skywalker did not receive the attention he needed from the Jedi Council, and the Sith Lord Palpatine — later known as Darth Sidious — exploited this. By manipulating Anakin’s emotions, Palpatine drew him to the dark side of the Force and completely transformed Skywalker as a person. This was no longer the same Skywalker we had known through the earlier films. He had become Darth Vader, a new name given to him by Palpatine himself. Once the character’s personality changed, his group changed as well. Darth Vader no longer had anything

in common with the Jedi; he felt only hatred toward them. If Anakin Skywalker belongs to the Jedi group of towers, then Darth Vader — the person Anakin becomes — belongs to the Sith group. This is a very clear example that makes a character's change of group easy to understand. It is easy to perceive because, in simplified terms, the Jedi are "good" and the Sith are "bad": Anakin Skywalker is a Jedi, Darth Vader is a Sith. Of course, this is a major simplification. In reality, it is difficult to say that all Jedi are good and all Sith are bad, because both sides have their own motives and goals. I am only describing how it appears from the perspective of an ordinary viewer. I hope my point is clear.

Harvey Dent, also known as Two-Face, from The Dark Knight (2008) belongs to the same general category. Harvey Dent is a young Gotham prosecutor distinguished by honesty and ambition. At first, he stands on the same side as Batman and Commissioner Gordon. Later he experiences an incident that severely disfigures one side of his face. The event destroys his psychological stability: the external damage becomes a reflection of his inner split. From that moment, Harvey Dent becomes Two-Face. His principal attribute is a coin with one clean side and one burned side. Two-Face uses this coin to decide people's fates. The coin also symbolizes the loss of control over his own destiny, a refusal to make moral choices, and a belief that justice belongs to chance rather than law. Here we see the same pattern: after certain events and personal changes, a character moves from one group to another. Harvey Dent fought for justice, while Two-Face turns against it.

I would like to conclude this set of examples with Light Yagami from the 2006 anime Death Note, whom we have also mentioned before. Light is the best student in Japan and accidentally obtains a notebook capable of killing people. He sees in it an opportunity to create a perfect and just world by killing criminals. As the story develops, however, Light loses control of himself. Eventually, Light Yagami becomes the most dangerous criminal of all — a person who himself turns against justice by killing not only criminals but anyone who gets in his way. Yet this example is even more interesting than it first appears. An important detail is that Light participates in the investigative group trying to catch him, deliberately confusing the detectives. This means that he is formally part of the

detectives’ group of towers led by L, while simultaneously acting against that group from within. Although Light belongs to the investigative team, his thinking has already changed completely. He does not even notice how a person who once wanted to build a better world becomes one of its cruelest elements.

In this chapter I have tried to describe what groups of characters are and the ways characters can be grouped, both within a single work and across separate works. We have also examined why some of the most interesting characters are those who change from one group of towers to another. Now it is time to move naturally into the subject of stereotypes about tower groups.

Stereotypes of Tower Groups

It is no secret that films, television series, anime, and books have their own stereotypes as well as so-called clichés. These stereotypes and clichés also apply to groups of different characters. It is important to note that many viewers often confuse the concepts of stereotypes and clichés. Let us first make the distinction clearer.

A stereotype is a simplified, even formulaic, idea about people or groups of people. Stereotypes are often based on prejudice or established assumptions. In cinema, stereotypes usually concern characters or communities. For example: a Russian character must drink vodka and speak with a strong accent; a blonde woman is stupid but sweet; an Asian person is a computer genius. It is important to remember that a stereotype is a superficial representation and, as these examples show, it can also be offensive.

A cliché is an overused artistic device or plot turn that has become uninteresting and banal because it has been repeated too often. Clichés more often concern plot and visual solutions. Examples include a hero walking away from an explosion without looking back, a couple kissing in the rain, or a seemingly bad person turning out to be good after all.

Roughly speaking, clichés concern plot and visuals, while stereotypes concern characters.

I have defined clichés so that we can distinguish the two concepts. In this chapter, however, we will focus more heavily on stereotypes and their role in films. The possible categories are extremely broad. Stereotypes may be gender-based, ethnic, social, cultural, professional, genre-based, and so on.

Gender stereotypes, for example, include the image of a strong man and a weak, dependent woman. This has been demonstrated in many films, such as Casino Royale (2006) and The Devil Wears Prada (2006).

Ethnic stereotypes include generalized depictions of nationalities and races. Examples might be Asians portrayed as masters of Eastern martial arts or Russians portrayed as people accustomed to extremely harsh living conditions. Such stereotypes can be found in films such as Rocky IV (1985) and The Karate Kid (2010).

Social stereotypes include ideas such as the rich being evil and arrogant while the poor are kind but unfortunate. Examples can be found in American Psycho (2000) and The Pursuit of Happyness (2006).

Another category is professional stereotypes — formulaic images of people in certain occupations. For example: the police officer is a hero, the doctor is cold, the teacher is boring. Examples of such stereotypes can be found in the series House (2004) and the film Police Academy (1984).

Age stereotypes are assumptions about the behavior of people of different ages. For example: young people are irresponsible, while older people are grumpy. Examples can be found in films such as 17 Again (2009) and Project X (2012).

Genre stereotypes are the kinds of stereotypes many viewers have already grown tired of. One example is a story in which the protagonist always succeeds because, within the plot, they are practically unbeatable — or because the story repeatedly protects them with plot armor. Examples include the Rambo films (1982–2019) and the Mission: Impossible series (1996–2025).

By discussing these examples, I do not mean to say that stereotypes are always bad. Stereotypes can be appropriate when authors use them to

help viewers quickly understand certain things. The images of the Jedi and the Sith in Star Wars, for example, can also be considered stereotypical, but with an important qualification: their creator drew on real historical and mythological images. The Jedi embody the archetype of the noble warrior-monk, resembling a samurai, a Zen monk, a knight of a religious order, or all of these at once. The Sith, meanwhile, embody the classic fallen hero or dark magician — the archetype of a villain who has succumbed to temptation, comparable to Lucifer or Faust. Even the colors of the characters' lightsabers function as visual stereotypes. Green and blue symbolize goodness, order, and wisdom, while red signals evil, aggression, and danger. Through these colors, the author gives us an emotional clue. The viewer immediately understands whom they are expected to support.

Star Wars is an especially important phenomenon in cinema because George Lucas, the creator of the saga, consciously designed it as a form of modern mythology, drawing on Joseph Campbell's ideas in The Hero with a Thousand Faces. This is why good and evil are presented so strongly through contrast and symbolism. Heroes and villains are intuitively recognizable. The whole story is built around cinematic archetypes: the hero, the mentor, the traitor, the fallen one, and so on. George Lucas did not create one of the highest-grossing franchises in history by relying on stereotypes alone. He drew inspiration from mythology, the Bible, and history, and then adapted those elements for cinema. In a sense, he gave new life to archetypes with which people were already familiar.

When an entire film is built only on stereotypes, however, it becomes less interesting to watch because everything grows painfully predictable. There are exceptions, of course: some films deliberately exist in order to demonstrate or mock stereotypes. One example is Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan (2006).

The Ground Beneath the Tower

Just as a tower stands on some kind of ground, a character exists within some kind of universe. It does not matter whether it is a cinematic universe, a comic-book universe, a television universe, a literary world, or something else. I would like to devote this chapter specifically to the universes in which our favorite characters exist. The universe or world is just as important as the character within it. We can say that a character and the universe they inhabit are inseparably connected. They are connected because a character cannot exist completely apart from a universe, just as a universe cannot be fully revealed without characters inside it.

First, we should clarify one simple point. There are three basic types of "ground" beneath a tower: fictional, meaning invented; real, meaning the world in which you and I live; and historical, meaning the world that existed before us. The historical type can include many periods, from the Stone Age to the era of the Second World War. It is important to remember, however, that these types of "tower ground" can easily overlap. A fictional universe, for example, can combine very well with a historical one. Films such as Pirates of the Caribbean (2003–2017), King Arthur, and Gods of Egypt (2016) demonstrate this kind of fusion. In other words, a universe does not have to belong to only one category. It may be a combination of different types within which different characters exist.

A universe gives the viewer clues about what to expect from a work. One of the most famous introductions to a fictional universe in popular culture is the opening of Star Wars. Each film begins with the familiar phrase, "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away…" This sentence immediately tells the audience that the story is unfolding in a fictional universe. People therefore do not expect to see, for example, the president of the United States appear in the story. A universe is also revealed through landscapes, objects, languages, and, of course, the characters themselves. Returning to Star Wars, we can see many visual clues: repeated images of outer space, spacecraft, advanced weapons, and so on. The superhuman "Force" used by the characters makes it extremely

difficult for viewers to connect the setting with the ordinary real world. The natural conclusion is that this universe is fictional — an invented one.

Now let us examine a different type of universe through the famous Mission: Impossible franchise (1996–2025). In these films, we see a modern world that is real and familiar to us. Each film takes place in real locations, and the locations are explicitly identified. Countries, cities, and other real places are mentioned repeatedly. We see ordinary familiar objects rather than futuristic blasters. The characters, of course, possess unusual skills that may look shocking to many viewers. Yet there is nothing truly supernatural about them. With enough training, an ordinary person could at least theoretically develop similar abilities. Based on these factors, we can classify this franchise as taking place in a real-world type of universe.

That leaves one more type of universe: the historical one. For this, let us examine the 2023 film Napoleon. The work begins with scenes showing events of the French Revolution. Early in the film, we see the public execution of Marie Antoinette, a real historical event that took place on October 16, 1793. The visual sense of the universe is reinforced by details such as people’s clothing, their lack of grooming, poor sanitation, images of old Paris, weapons, and so on. When all of these elements are combined, a viewer who knows the historical context can easily conclude that the universe is historical in nature.

We have now examined three basic types of universes that can be found in many works. But that certainly does not mean we are limited to only these three in pure form. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, different types of universes can be combined in very interesting ways. Let us look more closely at these combinations through clear and well-known examples.

The series The Boys (2019–2026) takes place in the present-day United States. It depicts a world that is highly familiar to us, with recognizable large cities, memes, presidents, major corporations, terrorists, perverts, and many other features of modern life. There is, however, one major condition: some people in this world have superpowers. In the series they are called “Supes.” It is also important that the Supes obtained their abilities through a special substance known as Compound V. In other

words, they were not chosen by gods, bitten by radioactive spiders, or transformed by bizarre accidents in laboratories. They are essentially ordinary people like us, but enhanced through a special drug. As a result, they often behave like ordinary people too. This is one of the factors that separates The Boys from Marvel. The series also contains very subtle analogies with real events that happened — and, at the time of writing, continue to happen — in our own world. For that reason, I personally consider The Boys a highly unusual work that combines as many as three universes. You may naturally ask: where does the third one come from? Let us examine that as well. The Boys contains elements of the real world — the same countries, objects, cultural references, memes, and other parts of contemporary reality — so we can call part of it a real-world universe. At the same time, its characters possess superpowers that do not exist in reality, so it is also fictional. But if the viewer has seen enough other films, another layer becomes clear: The Boys is a satire of superhero universes such as DC and Marvel. For ease of explanation, I will treat those superhero worlds as one broad category. The Boys contains obvious counterparts to heroes from other universes: Superman becomes Homelander, Aquaman becomes the Deep, Wonder Woman becomes Queen Maeve, the Flash becomes A-Train, Captain America becomes Soldier Boy, and so on. Once we notice this, it becomes impossible to ignore that The Boys is fundamentally satirical. It satirizes familiar superhero comics, the American government, and modern society as a whole. In my view, it is partly this intersection of several universes through one continuous satire that makes The Boys a genuinely unique series.

With these examples, I simply wanted to demonstrate the kinds of universes that can serve as foundations for different works, how several types can intersect within a single story, and how the universes of other works can themselves become one of the reference layers inside another work.

The Need for Structure When Building a Character

After studying all of these elements of character “towers,” it is certainly very easy to become confused. This may not be the simplest formula for structuring characters, but once again, what is described in this book is simply how I personally see the structure of characters. You may have your own ideas about how characters in works can be structured; I have merely demonstrated the method that I find the most universal and easiest to apply — again, for myself. The purpose of this work is therefore not to prove that my formula is the only correct one. The goal is to share another method that some readers may find interesting. Mathematics does not have a single formula for solving every problem either. Methods can differ and still be correct as long as they lead to the same answer. The same applies to building a character. Any method of structuring a hero can be successful if the final image is compelling and capable of earning the empathy of the viewer or reader.

I would like to draw your attention, however, to the fact that changing a structure is not the same thing as reducing it. As we have already established in this book, a character is an extremely multilayered phenomenon. If we remove even one important element from that structure — any of the elements discussed above — the character may simply stop working properly.

Towers, bricks, cement, layers, sky, ground, groups, and everything else on the list are only a way of visualizing a character’s structure. These visual elements can easily be replaced if you have enough imagination, and there is nothing wrong with that. But if an author fails to develop the reasons behind a character, their external image, thoughts, beliefs, and actions, then the whole structure falls apart. Such a character may still exist in the story, but they are unlikely to become interesting.

At the same time, authors should not become too trapped in these rules. Otherwise the creative process can slow down. I say this from my own experience working with characters. Structure should not be a set of walls; it should be a tool. A character should not merely pass a set of standards — a character should breathe.

The Character in Practice

This chapter has an unusually personal and almost sacred meaning for me because, in essence, the idea I am about to describe was the original catalyst for this entire work. I very much hope that I can communicate it to you correctly and that you will appreciate what I am trying to say.

In the previous chapters, we examined many different aspects that influence how characters are built in a wide variety of works. I also gave many familiar examples from films, television series, animation, and other forms of storytelling. But a reasonable question arises: does this whole structure function in real life as well? My answer is yes — very much so. Perhaps my explanation will shift your perception of this book from a theoretical guide toward something closer to personal development. Still, let us continue to treat this work as it was originally intended: as a theoretical guide.

The main problem is that many people believe their lives are very boring. They do not consider their own stories unique. If someone asked how a film adaptation of their life would look, they would probably answer, “boring.” And some of those people would be absolutely right. Sometimes it feels as though the only real-life “characters” are Kanye West and Donald Trump. The good news, however, is that anyone can become a character, even if not everyone is one at this moment.

Many people also hold the stereotype that a life must contain a great deal of “action” in order to be interesting. I strongly disagree. Stories exist in many different genres, and any person can choose the genre that best fits their own life. It does not have to be action. Not everyone is Ethan Hunt from Mission: Impossible, and not all of us are Jordan Belfort from The Wolf of Wall Street. There are many fictional characters whose lives contain almost no action, yet we still enjoy watching them. Theodore from Her (2013), for example, is an ordinary writer who falls in love with an operating system. Nick Naylor from Thank You for Smoking (2005) is a tobacco-company lobbyist who promotes the company’s interests. Lars from Lars and the Real Girl (2007) is a shy young man who forms a

relationship with a life-sized doll. There is no conventional “action” in their lives. They live in a world much like ours, work ordinary jobs, and experience the same emotions we do. Yet they are interesting to watch. And if we continue through the elements of the tower, it becomes obvious that “action” is not the point at all.

The sky above the tower is something many people genuinely lack in real life. They live simply in order to live, without a specific final goal and, even more often, without a concrete plan. Yes, we have already discussed exceptions such as Shrek, characters who do not begin with a clearly formulated goal. But, dear readers, I doubt that any of us is Shrek. Moreover, the universe of Shrek’s animated story itself pushes him into adventure. We must understand clearly that we do not live inside an animated universe. No one except ourselves is guaranteed to push us toward changing in any particular direction.

In real life, we often see a strange tendency: people are interested in everything, yet deeply committed to nothing. Because of this, the sky above our towers becomes cloudy. We simply do not understand in which direction to build, and so we remain in one place. This is one reason many university applicants today choose very broad fields such as law, business administration, international relations, and so on. By entering such programs, people preserve flexibility for the future while also giving themselves access to potentially stable, reasonably paid careers. I am not trying to judge whether this is good or bad. I am simply stating a fact: many young people today do not have clear goals or plans for the future. For a character living in our reality, formulated goals and plans are extremely important. Remember: we do not have plot support that will automatically tell us where to go next.

For clarity, imagine two young men who are identical in every other respect and live in identical conditions: Adam and Benjamin. Adam is an average person living a conventional life. Adam is not a character. Benjamin lives in the same world and society as you and I, but Benjamin is a character. When deciding on a future career, Adam might say, “I don’t know exactly what I want. But I definitely don’t want to go hungry in the future. I know a little bit about many things, so I’ll study business administration. I’ll figure out the rest later.” Benjamin, on the other hand,

might say, “I’ve realized that I really love the restaurant business. I want to open the best restaurant in my city and earn a Michelin star, so I’m going to study business administration. At the same time, I’ll work as a cook or waiter in a restaurant so I can understand how the business works from the inside.”

It is a rhetorical question whose future you find more interesting. The simple difference is that Adam’s sky is cloudy while Benjamin’s is clear. I hope this example makes the role of the “sky” — setting a goal — clearer in our own lives. We will also examine the remaining individual elements through the examples of Adam and Benjamin.

Now we move naturally to the bricks and cement of the tower. As you remember, the cement represents a character’s thoughts and beliefs, while the bricks are the actions the character takes in order to continue building the tower. It is important to remember that the “cement” — the thoughts — comes first, and the actions follow. This is because thought and idea are primary.

If we look at the “cement” separately, it is easy to see that many people in the modern world have difficulty with it. And, in a sense, this is not entirely our own fault. It is easy to say, “Think about what matters and ignore what does not.” But day after day, our attention is managed by large corporations such as Facebook. It is understandably difficult to think only about our goals, plans, and ideas when social networks and their algorithms focus our attention on short, meaningless videos whose main purpose is entertainment. Major technology companies spend billions of dollars trying to make people spend as much time as possible inside their platforms. This is one reason, for example, that students may find it far more appealing to watch a huge stream of ten-second entertainment clips than to spend more time studying subjects in which they have gaps.

In this respect, people in the past often had a higher level of mental clarity despite having access to less information and fewer sources of knowledge. TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube did not exist. People read more books and newspapers instead. Of course, not every book or newspaper was directly connected with a particular person’s goals. But at

the very least, people often maintained a much higher level of focus while performing an activity. As a result, the “cement” was of higher quality.
Now I would like to examine this phenomenon through Adam and Benjamin. Adam devotes time to his career only within the walls of the university. During exam periods he also goes to the library so that he can focus on studying, although even there he does not always succeed. He has accounts on all the popular social networks and spends quite a lot of time on them. Of course, he sometimes comes across useful material about making money, self-development, and similar topics. But he spends far more time on entertainment because he believes that after studying hard at university he deserves to “switch off” by scrolling. Yet he only thinks of this as rest. In reality, it is not rest at all. He simply redirects his attention and thoughts toward simpler and more pleasant things.
Benjamin, by contrast, is almost obsessed with his idea. Of course he also has social-media accounts, where he watches some content and keeps in touch with friends and acquaintances. But algorithms quickly recognize when someone is genuinely interested in a subject. As a result, Benjamin is shown far more videos with recipes, restaurant ratings, recommendations, and similar material. He also tries to apply what he learns from social media in practice. When he finds an interesting recipe, he attempts to reproduce it. In this way, his attention remains within the range of his plans, and he improves the skills he actually needs. This comparison leads to a simple conclusion: either the world around you begins to adjust itself to your thoughts and plans, or you end up adjusting yourself to the plans of the world around you. Only by remaining focused on your own “cement” can a person-character begin laying “bricks” — actions. Those very bricks are what I would like to analyze next.
As we have already established in this work, thoughts — the “cement” — give rise to actions — the “bricks.” Since many of us have problems with our thoughts because of the plans and mechanisms of large corporations, the same problem is reflected in our actions. It is genuinely difficult to do something meaningful after scrolling through, watching, and reading enormous amounts of random information online. Many people mistakenly interpret this kind of leisure as rest, but in reality the brain continues working. That is why prolonged scrolling often leaves us

exhausted and unwilling to do anything afterward. Even material about self-development and personal productivity does not always help. Most of us have probably seen more than enough such videos. They usually repeat the same simple truths from one clip to another. We begin to feel that we already know all of it because we have heard it so many times. But knowing and merely being aware are different things. We may know something in theory but fail to apply it, and therefore we do not fully know it at all.

For example, what do we know about healthy sleep? That we should sleep seven to eight hours, go to sleep and wake up at the same time, and sleep in complete darkness. Fine — we know that. But how many people actually have healthy sleep in real life? The answer becomes less confident. How many of us have tried to fix our sleep schedule? Many, if not almost everyone. And did all of us succeed? Certainly not. This makes the barely visible difference between “being informed” and truly “knowing” much easier to understand.

Two conclusions follow from this: 1) instead of filling your thoughts with unnecessary and random information, it is better sometimes to let them unload; 2) useful information should be applied, otherwise it risks becoming useless.

These two conclusions help us better understand how real-life “characters” relate to their actions. And here we return once again to Adam and Benjamin.

Adam does not see many obligatory activities in his life beyond university. He lives almost entirely in the present because he has neither the energy nor perhaps the desire to do much beyond his studies. His future career is an extremely vague concept to him. He believes that attending university alone will secure his future. After classes, he spends a little time on everyday tasks and then moves on to “rest.” As we have already discussed, this “rest” is not really rest in the proper sense. Adam identifies rest with social networks, computer games, or meaningless gatherings with friends and acquaintances. Not only is he failing to rest properly; it is not even clear what exactly he is resting from. To be fair, he does not give one hundred percent at university either. Again, university is simply Adam’s way of protecting himself against uncertainty

in the future, not a passion or a genuine interest. Therefore he does not intend to spend too much energy on studying. Yet Adam is always tired and drained. I think it is now obvious why.

What is Benjamin doing during all of this? Because he has a clear goal, he approaches everything with much greater enthusiasm. He may not be the best student in his university classes, but at the very least he eagerly remembers any information he considers useful. We should also remember that Benjamin works in a restaurant. The job is certainly not always pleasant, and Benjamin knows this firsthand. But he understands that it gives him valuable experience that will help him considerably in the future. Benjamin is not superhuman, however, so he also needs leisure. Naturally, he sometimes spends time with friends and sometimes consumes social-media content. He simply does so far less than Adam. When a person is genuinely tired from meaningful activity, not much time remains for endless passive entertainment. I would like to repeat an important detail: Benjamin is not a machine. This lifestyle sometimes leads him to burnout, which slows his progress. That is why he occasionally allows himself leisure that is less productive than it could theoretically be. Adam, on the other hand, mainly needs something with which to fill his time. Through these two young men, we can therefore see the difference between high-quality and low-quality bricks and cement.

Now we move to comparing the layers of Adam’s and Benjamin’s towers. To be fair, the picture here is quite similar. Every person has layers — so-called social masks. We put on different social masks when interacting with different people. We behave one way with our parents, another with teachers, and another with friends. This is completely natural. With our parents we usually have more trusting relationships; with colleagues, more professional ones; with teachers we try to be more tactful; and with friends we allow ourselves a little more freedom. In this way, one tower can contain many layers: professional colleague, loving son or daughter, diligent student, cheerful friend, or pleasant drinking companion. These are all layers that we use from situation to situation. But even in something as ordinary as social masks, the traits of a true character can be identified quite clearly. Let us return again to Adam and Benjamin.

Adam is the kind of person who, in many social groups, could be described as an absolutely ordinary guy. At university, teachers see him as a student who is neither especially intelligent nor especially foolish. He tries to complete the assignments he is required to do, but rarely goes beyond them. He tries to attend classes, though he sometimes misses them for various reasons. Teachers have many students like Adam — I would even say more than half. To his parents he is a loving son who tries to visit them and stay in contact. His classmates see him as a decent guy they do not mind talking with around campus or while standing in a group. He is not the brilliant student surrounded by people before exams, but neither is he the rebel who is constantly in conflict with teachers. When his classmates or friends go out somewhere, they will of course invite him too. But Adam's absence would not be so important that everyone immediately noticed. From this we can identify roughly three layers of Adam's personality. And, as you have probably already noticed, they all share one feature: Adam is "one of the group," not "the one." He does what everyone else does, regardless of which social mask he is wearing.

And now we come to Benjamin. His teachers know him as a curious student. He constantly approaches them after lectures and tries to obtain information relevant to him about study materials or opportunities to gain practical experience. Naturally, some university teachers sometimes find these extra conversations tiring. But for Benjamin, getting the details he needs is more important than avoiding keeping a lecturer at the university for a few extra minutes. To his parents, Benjamin is still simply their son. Yet from an early age they recognized his curiosity and inner determination. They always knew that Benjamin was not the kind of person who could easily be talked out of something he truly pursued and desired. This trait showed them that it was often better to leave Benjamin alone with his own goals and tasks. To his colleagues, Benjamin is the employee who either knows everything or wants to learn everything about the work around him. People above him in the hierarchy try to involve him in different work processes and know that difficult tasks can be trusted to him. People below him often ask him questions about work. To his friends, meanwhile, Benjamin is a member of the social circle who

can maintain a conversation but does not appear very often unless the situation calls for it. They might describe him as an acquaintance who sometimes joins weekend gatherings. Here we can already see and feel the difference. Regardless of the social mask Benjamin is wearing, he always tries to immerse himself more deeply in what interests him than other people require of him. Benjamin's level of involvement as a character is consistently higher than that of those around him.

Based on the elements we have listed and analyzed, we can conclude that one of the most important traits of real-life characters is obsession. They desire what they need far more strongly than most people do. They are not indifferent to the world, and certainly not to themselves. They may place their desires and ambitions above almost everything else. That is obsession. The elements we have discussed — cement (thoughts), bricks (actions), the sky above the tower (the character's goals and tasks), and the layers of the tower (social masks) — all contain one important distinguishing feature: obsession. It is obsession that pushes such characters beyond the average level.

We have dealt with the main elements, but what about the others? The ground on which the tower stands is also important, although in real life it is somewhat more straightforward. As we remember, the ground is the universe in which a character exists. In a broad sense, we all inhabit the same universe with the same physical laws. At the time of writing, we all live in the twenty-first century on planet Earth, in an era largely shaped by market economics and capitalism. But if we look more closely at our shared universe, we can identify many smaller universes within it. There are countries on our planet where life is not organized entirely around capitalism. North Korea, for example, operates under a socialist planned economy, while China uses a socialist market economy. We should also remember that in the same universe and on the same planet, people can live in Brazilian favelas while a royal family lives in enormous estates. At the very same moment, one American may be ordering a sandwich and coffee while another man in Iraq is fighting for his life. And all of us still live on one planet. This means that, in essence, we inhabit one universe that is itself divided into many smaller ones.

As for stereotypes about towers, the same functions discussed earlier also operate here. Stereotypes form around nationality, age, profession, and many other characteristics. In media, these stereotypes originally arose from the real life that you and I experience. But it is also important to distinguish them from stereotypes that authors deliberately use to construct a story. Take, for example, the stereotype that good always defeats evil. In the context of our real universe, this comparison is not entirely accurate. The difficulty is that defining exactly what is “good” and what is “evil” is not so simple. Every person and every side has reasons for taking particular actions. For that reason, dividing everything neatly into good and evil is often inappropriate.

On the other hand, we also have clichés, which we examined earlier. Here the picture looks different. While stereotypes mostly arise from real life, clichés more often arise from works of fiction. Many clichés have very little to do with reality. As I wrote earlier, clichés are used more for the visual and artistic side of a work.

Let us return to Benjamin and Adam. If we said that both of them loved drinking with classmates until they passed out, we could safely call that a cliché — the assumption that all students love consuming huge amounts of alcohol. Or imagine that Benjamin had a large belly simply because he worked as a restaurant cook. That too would be a visual cliché. In real life, however, people often break clichés and stereotypes. Benjamin may work as a cook while still being in excellent physical shape. He may constantly stay after lectures without possessing all the attributes of a stereotypical nerd: he does not wear huge glasses or walk strangely. Lumberjacks do not necessarily wear red plaid shirts either. Muscular people are not always unintelligent; some of them have doctoral degrees. From all of this, we can conclude that clichés often have little connection with reality because they are largely born on screens and serve visual or artistic expression. Stereotypes, in contrast, arise in real life and then gradually move onto the screen.

The final point on the list — though certainly not the least important — is how groups of towers function in practice. As we already know, groups of towers consist of towers aligned in goals, ideology, and worldview, often with similar plans. This phenomenon genuinely exists in real life. It is

important not to confuse such groups with friends, acquaintances, colleagues, or other people in your social circle. Not all of your friends or acquaintances share goals, plans, or a worldview similar to yours. Groups of towers form only when a certain number of people have remarkably similar values in life. This is one reason that, for example, every member of the Avengers was willing to sacrifice themselves for another member. I do not think every one of us would make an enormous sacrifice for every friend or acquaintance. Even if someone would, it is unlikely they would do so for a very large circle of people.

Let us return to Adam and Benjamin. Since we are discussing groups of towers, we can consider them together because the broad circumstances of their lives are similar in many respects. Nevertheless, the statement that Adam and Benjamin form a group of towers is false. They are both students, study the same subject, are the same age, and are in roughly similar financial situations, yet their outlooks differ radically. Adam is guided by conventional views of life and follows the path that many of us follow. Benjamin, by contrast, has a relatively clear and structured plan. As we discussed earlier, Benjamin also possesses an obsession with his goal that Adam lacks. It follows that Adam and Benjamin do not form a group of towers.

Here it is important to note that groups of towers tend to be drawn toward one another, sometimes without consciously realizing it. Again, I do not want this work to resemble success literature, but there is an idea many of you have probably heard before: strong people attract strong surroundings. There is some truth in that statement. Let us return once again to our two characters. According to this logic, Adam will most likely attract people similar to himself. The key point, however, is that people like Adam are the overwhelming majority. This means it is much easier for Adam to find his group of towers than it is for Benjamin. But it is not quite that simple. Adam may find a larger number of people, yet there is no guarantee that these will be high-quality relationships capable of helping him reach his goals. Benjamin’s group may be smaller but more valuable. Benjamin himself is a more unusual person than Adam, however awkward that may sound. While Adam may have a group of fellow students who live from one exam period to the next, Benjamin has the

chance to find a group of cooks or people who also want to succeed in the restaurant business. They can help one another develop, introduce each other to others in the same field, and create healthy competition within the group. There may be fewer of them than in Adam's group, but they may make far greater efforts to develop their group of towers. In a group of towers, therefore, quality often matters more than quantity.

We have now dealt with groups of towers in both theory and practice. It is also important to discuss the broader grouping of towers, which is a little more complicated. You have probably met different people in your life who shared very similar personality traits. You may have met someone new and thought, "He really reminds me of someone." At this point we enter the territory of psychology. Human beings and their psychology operate through similar mechanisms, which is why different people can resemble one another in character, behavioral style, and habits. People, like fictional characters, can be classified in many ways: extroversion and introversion, personality archetypes, MBTI types, and so on. These traits form throughout our development over the course of our lives. Our personalities are influenced by many factors — upbringing, childhood, life experiences, and much more. Once we understand all of this, it is not surprising that people can resemble one another so strongly. Many fictional characters are also grouped according to personality traits taken from real people — from you and me. Human beings develop characteristics that we later see reflected in fiction. This happens because authors often draw inspiration directly from people. Many famous characters on the screen have very real prototypes, or at least real people who inspired them. An interesting process then takes place. When a work becomes popular, it gains fans. Those fans often admire its characters and may adopt not only their style or mannerisms but also certain personality traits, worldviews, and ideals. Character traits therefore move from real people into fictional works and, later, from those fictional characters back into other real people. This means that the grouping of towers is also a very real phenomenon that we observe everywhere in everyday life.

To sum up this long chapter — and, in many ways, this entire work — I simply wanted to show clearly that the tower theory can also be applied

to you and me. I would like to emphasize once more that every one of us has genuine potential to become a character: a character as interesting as Tony Stark, Anakin Skywalker, Bruce Wayne, or Jordan Belfort. In creating the tower theory, I wanted not only to place fictional characters into some kind of structure but also to create a way of making our own lives feel more vivid. Some people divide fictional worlds and our world too radically. Yes, in some respects they are right: we do not have intergalactic wars, schools for wizards, or armies of minions working for supervillains. But that is no reason to believe that our lives are much duller than fictional worlds. Romanticize your life as if it were a film. Romanticize yourself as a character. Life becomes much more interesting that way…

List of Mentioned Works

Below are the works mentioned in the text of the book. Repeated mentions have been combined into a single entry.

12 Angry Men (1957) — film.
A Clockwork Orange (1971) — film.
American Psycho (2000) — film.
Better Luck Tomorrow (2002) — film.
Breaking Bad (2008–2013) — television series.
Dexter (2006) — television series.
Drive (2011) — film.
Fast & Furious: Tokyo Drift (2006) — film.
Fight Club (1999) — film.
Harry Potter — film series.
Inglourious Basterds (2009) — film.
Iron Man (2008–2013) — film series.
John Wick (2014) — film.
Joker (2019) — film.
La La Land (2016) — film.
Mad Max: Fury Road (2015) — film.
No Country for Old Men (2007) — film.
Pirates of the Caribbean (2003–2017) — film series.
Rocky (1976) — film.
Scarface (1983) — film.
Spider-Man (2002) — film.
Split (2016) — film.
Star Wars — film series.
Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith (2005) — film.
Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope (1977) — film.
Suicide Squad (2016) — film.
Taxi Driver (1976) — film.
The Boys (2019) — television series.
The Dark Knight (2008) — film.
The Green Mile (1999) — film.
The Lion King (1994) — animated film.
The Matrix (2003) — film.
The Shining (1980) — film.
Titanic (1997) — film.
Troy (2004) — film.
Brother (1997) — film.
Moana — animated film.
Naruto — anime.
Forrest Gump — film.
Shrek — animated film.